



File Code: 1950
Date: October 17, 2018

Dear Forest friends and neighbors,

You may recall that the Sierra National Forest requested your input on the Forestwide Prescribed Fire Project back in May. We received helpful input from the public at that time which has led us to reconsider aspects of the project. We have made changes to both our environmental analytical approach and to the proposed action. We are taking this opportunity to ask for any additional public input on the project in light of these changes.

As a quick reminder about the project the reason for the project is to return fire as a process back to the ecosystem. Therefore, we are proposing to increase the pace and scale of prescribed burning to reduce the risk of uncharacteristic, severe wildfire on ecosystem health and public health and safety. We believe that an increase in our prescribed burning would decrease the adverse effects of undesirable wildfire. The project proposes to apply prescribed fire to land within the Sierra National Forest that is outside of wilderness. Based on public input we are increasing the potential annual average of burning from 10,000 acres to up to 50,000 acres per year for the next 15 to 20 years. All other aspects of the proposal remain the same. Although we may not be able to ramp up to that number of acres immediately it is a goal that we hope to be able to achieve within the planning timeframe and therefore want to have considered the potential environmental impacts. Just as a reminder this forestwide project would provide a range of prescribed fire opportunities that can be prioritized and scheduled as necessary in any given year. Prescribed burning would be conducted within established guidelines law, regulation, and policy and consistent with the Forest Plan and in a manner that would balance limiting adverse environmental impacts with attaining the environmental benefits of adding fire back to the ecosystem in a controlled way. A key aspect of the project is describing the sideboards for burning under varying conditions on the ground to achieve burning to the same degree and in the same patterns as occurred historically prior to fire suppression when the ecosystem was operating with fire as a functioning process and to minimize unintended effects to natural resources, cultural resources, and other forest uses.

Last May we indicated that we were anticipating using an environmental assessment to analyze effects and meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act. Since that time we have identified that this project falls within a category of projects excluded from documentations in an environmental assessment or an environmental impact statement in Forest Service regulations (36 CFR 220.6 (e)), because it's a type of activity that has already been demonstrated not to have significant effects based on many previous analyses. Therefore rather than invest resources in analyzing effects we are working on a determination that the project does not raise uncertainty about significant effects related to the extraordinary circumstances defined in Forest Service regulations at 36 CFR 220.6(b). We are also making sure that the project would comply with the Forest plan and other environmental laws. A final decision memorandum for this project is expected to be published in January 2019.

A detailed description of the need for the project and the proposed action is available on the project website at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=53849>



Comments welcome!

We are still in the stages of project planning that allow us to adjust the project based on public input. Your comments, ideas, and concerns regarding this proposed action are important to the design of the project and the determination if this project appropriately fits under a category where the effects are already known. Please provide your input and ideas about the proposed action and identification of severe anticipated effects from this proposed action.

I request that you respond in writing on or before October 31, 2018.

Comments are being accepted electronically on the project website at <mailto:comments-pacificsouthwest-sierra@fs.fed.us>. Electronic comments must be submitted as part of the email message or as an attachment in plain text (.txt), Microsoft Word (.doc), rich text format (.rtf), or portable document format (.pdf). Written comments can also be mailed, faxed, or hand delivered to Dean Gould, Forest Supervisor, c/o Judi Tapia, Forest Planner, Sierra National Forest, 1600 Tollhouse Road, Clovis, CA 93611; Phone 559-297-0706, Fax 559-294-4809 during normal business hours. Business hours are from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, are part of the public record for this proposed action. Please comment to indicate your interest in the project and if you wish to remain on our mailing list for future updates. If you received a hard copy letter and would prefer to sign up for email notification or if you would like to change your existing email subscription, you visit the project website and click on "Subscribe to Email Updates" on the right-hand side.

No Administrative Review Process Planned

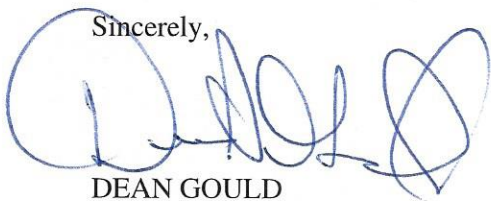
Different from what was originally explained in our May letter the proposed project is not subject to the Forest Service pre-decisional review (or objection) regulations of 36 CFR §218 Subparts A and B and there are no planned future public input opportunities so please make sure your voice is heard during this comment period if you have input.

Contact Information

For more information on the project and/or to request a hard copy or CD of the proposed action, please contact the Project Leader, Christine Handler, 559-920-2188 or email request to cahandler@fs.fed.us.

Thank you for your interest and participation in developing this project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dean Gould", with a large, stylized initial "D" and a long, sweeping horizontal stroke.

DEAN GOULD
Forest Supervisor

cc: chandler@fs.fed.us, Judi Tapia